**Evil Opponents, a Silent Majority & a Character of Courage**

***by Harry Osborne***

Have you noticed the way many politicians answer questions? Very few give a straight answer. One of their techniques is to talk around a subject for a while, but when they are done, one hears nothing of true substance. Another dodge is to answer a question with the equivalent of pleading the fifth amendment, "No comment." If that does not work, the old "I'm referring it to a committee for further study" ruse does the trick. The observable fact is that not much comes out of those committees once it is referred there for a quiet death. Why would someone try to shun an answer and keep a matter shrouded in silence? Why would one not want it to be known where he stands on a question? The most common reason is the fear of opposition from those who may not agree with the stated view. The safe road to avoid taking a stand is to stay quiet or issue a disclaimer to signal neutrality.

In Bible times, there were those who refused to take a stand for God and His truth. They were always condemned for such cowardice. It was the people of courage who pleased the Lord as they dared to stand against powerful enemies of God and the silent crowd of cowardice. In fact, that theme of the courageous defenders of truth in conflict with forces of evil and an acquiescing crowd is repeatedly found in Scripture.

**Elijah** was a man who stood in opposition to the wicked ways of King Ahab and his wife, Jezebel. Ahab and Jezebel had introduced the idolatry of Baal to Israel with all of its associated evils. Elijah stood against that system and urged others to oppose it as well.

When Ahab came face to face with Elijah, the king's first words were these: "Is that you, O troubler of Israel?" (1 Kings 18:17). Elijah replied, "I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father's house have, in that you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and you have followed Baal" (1 Kings 18:18).

When all of the people were gathered, they had a clear choice. Who would they believe and follow? Their king who had the power over them or Elijah who spoke an unpopular message of truth in opposition to the king? The Bible records the occasion in these words:

*And Elijah came to all the people, and said, `How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him.' But the people answered him not a word* (1 Kings 18:21).

It was a fifth amendment crowd who feared the king more than they loved the truth. However, God gave victory to His truth through Elijah that day.

In John 9, Jesus gave sight to a **man who had been born blind**. When the Pharisees who opposed Jesus asked the man who had made him to see, the man answered unashamedly even over the objections of the powerful Pharisees. However, the man's parents did not exhibit such courage. The Pharisees asked them how their son received his sight.

The parents responded, *"By what means he now sees we do not know, or who opened his eyes we do not know. He is of age; ask him. He will speak for himself"* (John 9:21). This answer was a dodge. They knew how he was made to see, but they were afraid to tell the Pharisees for fear of what they might do in retaliation. The next verses make that clear:

*His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had agreed already that if anyone confessed that He was Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, ‘He is of age; ask him"* (John 9:22-23).

They were cowards who issued their disclaimer to protect themselves from the Pharisees instead of standing for the truth regardless of the cost.

In John 12, we see another case of the same thing involving those who were in places of power, but did not want to lose their position by confessing Christ. Notice how the Bible describes these people:

*Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God* (John 12:42-43).

What a shame it was that these people loved the praise of men more than God! It is a sad fact that some still do.

Notice the contrast between those Jewish leaders and **Saul of Tarsus**, later called **the Apostle Paul**. When Saul of Tarsus was faced with the evidence of who Jesus really was, he turned and gave his full allegiance to the Lord Jesus (Acts 9:1-22; 22:1-21; 26:1-23). It is worth noting that with each recounting of Saul’s conversion in the book of Acts, the very next verses note the opposition that came to him as a result of his stand (Acts 9:23-30; 22:22-24; 26:24-25). As he went on standing for truth, the apostle’s persecutions only increased (2 Corinthians 11:23-33).

The intense pain and sorrow brought by the stoning, beatings, imprisonments, shipwrecks, multiple deprivations, and the various “perils” listed in 2nd Corinthians 11 cut deeper than we will ever understand. Yet, it is obvious that Paul suffered a deeper hurt, a great pain, a heartache that knew no solace. One can sense the greater hurt that came with the last peril named – “in perils among false brethren.” How sad! They knew the truth and had obeyed it. No doubt some of them had learned the saving gospel message from Paul himself and came to know the forgiveness found in Christ as a result of his teaching. This “*daily… deep concern for all the churches*” included the thought of brethren who valued their own ease, security or acceptance over the cause of the Lord. How many, like Demas, forsook him for a love of the present world, we may never know, though it is clear many abandoned him (2 Timothy 4:9-15). But Paul’s resolve was unwavering as he viewed the whole of the situation:

*At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear. Also I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion, And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen!* (2 Timothy 4:16-18).

If we are to serve God acceptably, we must realize our responsibility to stand for God and His truth regardless of the cost. At times, it will cost us ridicule, denunciation and possibly more. We must remember the ultimate praise of God is what we seek, not the temporary popularity of the world. Have we watched in silence as a brother was ravaged in standing for truth? If so, we need to look at our level of courage in the Lord – it may be seriously deficient. Let us never be the trembling deserter while another has to rise and take the trials alone, while we sought the path of ease or the praise of man rather than the path of courage. Rise up and stand for truth regardless of the cost and the Lord will give His praise in the everlasting glory before His throne in heaven!